

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,

A friend who is a psychologist and has thought a great deal about the psychological aspects of the war, said to me the other day that everything hinges on whether the people of this country are alive to what Hitlerism is and what the opposing conception is for which this country, however imperfectly and fitfully, stands; and whether they are for that reason wholehearted in waging the war.

WHOLE-HEARTEDNESS

This set me thinking about the meaning of whole-heartedness. There is no quality which so often won commendation from Christ. We have only to recall the parables of the man who sold all to obtain the pearl of great price, of the importunate widow, of the friend who hammered at midnight to obtain his loaves, the insistence on the girt loin and lighted lamp and the demand that we should love God with all our heart and all our strength and many other similar passages to see that whole-heartedness belonged to the core of Christ's thought and teaching.

What does whole-heartedness mean in relation to the war? I have no doubt that there is in the nation as a whole a dogged determination to see it through. For most of our people Nazi tyranny is unendurable; they would do anything rather than submit to it.

But this attitude is negative. Something more positive is needed for whole-heartedness. The bracing effect of danger is no lasting cure for the moral scepticism which our evidence showed to be widely prevalent both in the forces and in civilian life—the deep doubt whether the war, even though it has to be seen through, will make any real difference to life in the future (C.N.-L. 18, 25).

Whole-heartedness has always a religious quality. Only God can claim a man's whole heart, though men can worship an idol in place of God. A Christian's devotion to the nation can never be an unqualified one. Patriotism is not enough. To allow the nation to become an end in itself is to surrender Christianity altogether and to go over to Nazism—a spiritual treachery as real and as detestable as any fifth column activity.

But since God can be served only in the here and now, whole-heartedness means a complete dedication to the tasks of history. His will is denied or fulfilled in men's historical struggles. It is in, through and out of the actual situation, and not apart from it, that the leap must be made into a new order of justice and freedom. And that means *in this situation* a whole-hearted resistance to the armed might which threatens the extinction of the gains of civilisation.

Between this country and the dictatorships there is one vital difference. Evil has not yet among us enthroned itself in the seat of power. The forces of death have not yet got a stranglehold on the national life. The field is still free for the forces

of life to wrestle with them and overcome them; to make the social order the instrument of life and not of death. The possibility is still ours that Britain might save herself by her exertions and the world by her example. That possibility has to be preserved at all costs not for ourselves alone but for the sake of the French, against whom we are now forced to fight, for the sake of the Germans, and for the sake of mankind as a whole.

Since the end of man's being is to serve God, we can be whole-hearted in the nation's cause only if we believe that it is dedicated to the fulfilment of God's purposes. It is about this that there is a lurking doubt in the minds of many, even when it is not formulated in conscious thought. Only by dragging it into the open and frankly facing it can we achieve whole-heartedness. It is not enough to proclaim ideals that have had a partial realisation in our past history. Men are moved not by abstract ideas but by ideas that have captured the will and are being actually lived. That is the issue which is sharply raised in this week's supplement.

What is the Britain for which we are fighting? Is it the largely selfish and sluggish society we had become, the Britain of materialistic aims and unfair privilege and social injustice? Or is it a Britain that has found its soul in a dedication to a saving vision of a society in which human values come always first and the dominant aim is that every member of it should have the chance of fulfilling the purpose of his existence as a son of God? Can we achieve that simple clarity of purpose? Will there arise a body of people with sufficient disinterestedness, intelligence and resolution to translate that aim into the concrete terms of political and social organisation and activity? Can we during the war itself give proof of our faith and determination by here and now taking decisive action in that direction? We must, if the nation is to hold together. Nothing is powerful enough to prevail against Nazism or Communism that is not as revolutionary and passionate as they are.

Through the tribulation of this time something is struggling to the birth. It is something that has significance not for ourselves alone but for mankind as a whole. But it is among us that it might be born. It is already present in germ and promise in our heritage. But it is only by its becoming actual—by its taking shape as a conscious and resolute social purpose—that we can attain to the whole-heartedness, without which we may not be strong enough to win the war and assuredly will lack the strength to win the future after the war.

If this were to come about the whole situation would be transformed. To win the war would become in our thought wholly secondary to a larger purpose—and for that reason all the more necessary. This ultimate spiritual aim would determine both our conduct of the war and the terms on which, if victory is ours, we would end it.

HITLER'S WEAPON

I said at the beginning that it is essential to understand what Nazism *is*. Marshal Petain's fatal error was his blindness to the real character of the enemy. He thought that he could trust to the honour of soldiers; he did not know that in the Nazi rulers honour is dead. All that is left is a blind drive to power. This judgment of Nazism cannot be attributed simply to war hysteria. Even before the war the true nature of Nazism was not in doubt. The disaster has been that many leaders in the democracies refused to see it; many people do not understand it yet.

Nazism is built on a doctrine of man. What carried Hitler to power was a penetrating perception of the vices and weaknesses of men. The policy which made him

ruler of Germany was based, as Rauschning makes clear in his book, *The Revolution of Nihilism*, on a contemptuous view of human nature. The ideals to which men professed allegiance were only a flimsy façade which would give way at the first vigorous assault. Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, German culture, the Army, the Church, were all found lacking in moral power to withstand him.

His foreign policy was similarly based on the conviction that the democracies were morally decadent. He was confident that there were many in them who would prefer their own advantage to their country's good. He counted on finding politicians in other nations who would be ready to play his game. Events have proved his calculations to be right.

As against the humanist and liberal view of man, as guided in the main by reason and virtue and advancing steadily towards a more rational existence, the Nazi doctrine has proved itself to be more realistic. Christianity, too, takes a realistic view of human nature. It knows that human nature is corrupt and capable of any depravity. But, whereas the Nazi doctrine leaves the world a hell, Christianity sees man as the object of God's redeeming purpose. It takes him not as he is, but as he may become, and consequently regards him always with invincible hope. The future depends on which of these two views is true. The Christian doctrine of man is not a private philosophy for a minority, but the hinge of human destiny.

If this account be true, Hitlerism can be overcome neither without military means nor by military means alone. The false and depraving doctrine of man which lies at its heart can be driven out only by a recovery in thought, life and experience of the conception of man as a being responsible to God, called to strive after truth and virtue, and to live in trust and love with his fellow-men. What Christianity asserts is not merely that this is what man ought to be, but that this is what he *is*—a being made for these ends. The quarrel with Hitler is not about ideals but about the real nature of the world and of man.

THE CHALLENGE OF YOUTH

You do not need to be reminded of the bearing of this on the training of youth.

Sir William Beveridge, who has been appointed Commissioner to survey the available resources of man-power, in a letter a short time ago to *The Times*, called attention to the seriousness of unemployment, under-employment, or wrong employment among young people between the ages of 16 and 20. More than any other part of the community they need to be made to feel that they belong to it and that it needs their services.

Indifference to this problem in war-time may have disastrous consequences. Failure to recognise it as a fundamental problem in creating a new society will prevent us from achieving such a society.

It was an encouraging sign of an awakening national conscience when the Government set up eight months ago a National Youth Committee to deal with the problem, and a little later a circular was issued urging local education authorities to take action (C.N.L., No. 6). Considerable progress has since been made, and the majority of the education authorities have set up committees. A further circular has now been issued under the title "The Challenge of Youth" (No. 1,516. Stationery Office. 2d.), which attempts to present the "foundations of this new national movement," gives advice regarding aims and methods, and stresses the importance of enlisting the fullest co-operation of voluntary agencies. There is not room this week to say more about the circular. All of you who have anything to do with youth should get it.

THE RELIGIOUS TEACHING OF CHILDREN IN WAR-TIME

A letter from one of our members raises a question which must be in the minds of many parents. The writer says: "We and our children, as citizens, have to take our part, to be defended by weapons and force, to find good in successes which must entail heavy casualties for the enemy. All this obedience to Caesar, inevitable as we believe it to be at this point, makes the need for clear thought about God's will for us essential, if our children are not to find our teaching quite remote from reality."

A SCHOOL FOR CHAPLAINS

I have written many times of the significance for the future of the outlook of the youth of the nation now serving in the forces. There are no greater opportunities at the moment than those offered to chaplains. It is good news, therefore, that a reception centre and depot for army chaplains has been established at Chester for the purpose of equipping them better for their work, physically, mentally and spiritually. Chaplains of all denominations, except Roman Catholics, are sent on appointment to the centre for three weeks. The course includes physical training, lectures, discussion, advice about army matters and devotional help. A marked feature of the school is the remarkable fellowship which has grown up between Anglicans and Free Churchmen.

THE SUPPLEMENT

The writer of the supplement, the Rev. V. A. Demant, is the Rector of St. John's Church, Richmond. He has taken a leading part in the League of the Kingdom of God which is responsible for the publication of *Christendom*, a quarterly journal of Christian sociology; and in the Summer School of Sociology, which will hold its sixteenth meeting this month (July 22-26) at St. Hilda's College, Oxford. His last book *The Religious Prospect* (Frederick Muller, 7s. 6d.) is one of the most valuable contributions that has been made to an understanding of the present religious situation.

If any of you have evidence confirmatory of Mr. Demant's statement that "the hard way of war is showing us some of the laws of life that we did not learn in the peace," I shall be glad to hear from you.

Yours sincerely,

V. A. Demant

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OUR JUSTIFICATION

My dear Oldham,

The fate of the civilised world, in a crisis which has no parallel since the fifth century, will be decided within the next few weeks in one place only, in the soul of the British people. It is not enough to be in the right; nor is it enough to know that in the long run we have ample resources for victory. Some spiritual possession must take hold of us if we are not only to win, but, what is more important still, if there is to be one people left free to talk to the Germans after the war. Whatever happens, we are part of Europe again and we have all got to remake it together.

Up till the last week or two the home front has been supine, relying upon centuries of security. Habits of life have not been changed except at the last-minute bidding of compulsion. The deeper causes of this alarming lethargy are religious. Our inter-war past was not the true Britain and there was nothing to excite emotional conviction in defence of that. At the same time, we have not faith that this guilt-feeling can be removed by repentance while engaged in strife with our demonic foe. He, at least, is possessed of a spirit—perhaps the seven evil spirits who have entered the house of Europe because it was empty of any better kind—and this ecstasy carries him along with many fewer basic resources than we have. Our rational calculations and moral truisms are no match for an enemy who will go to the death in the name of Moloch.

To induce a corresponding possession in our own people—possession by the Holy Spirit—is the urgent task of religious leadership now. Words which were recently written in the *New English Weekly* deserve to be engraved on the minds of all who have public influence in our land: "The moral

strain is now near that point of maximum tension when either the national confidence will break or a new spirit of resolution will appear We are nearing the moment when the issue will be decided in a multitude of individual souls and the crisis will be of a terror analagous to that of the neophyte in supreme initiation."

TWO FORMS OF HEATHENISM

Whether we can get and bear that mood depends upon our faith and repentance, and these are two sides of the same thing: our responsibility under God. We are hampered by two kinds of heathenism in our midst. (By heathenism is meant nothing offensive, only utter ignorance of the meaning of Christianity.) One of them tries to magic away the fact that our fine English heritage has been corrupted by two centuries of life dominated by mechanical, industrialised and financial values. In our heart we all have a bad conscience about our recent past. Nobody really believes that if only Hitler had not started plundering round Europe we should still be on the good road to which we can confidently return when he is beaten. And we are not taken in a second time by the myth that we must get the external evil suppressed before we regenerate our national life. This nation has not been roused by appeals which assume that we are justified by our recent history and are threatened only by the foe without. We have been lulled and not stimulated by the worst disservice that Hitler has done us, namely to make our devitalised, urbanised and commercialist culture look by comparison less indecent than his bestial tyranny. That negative superiority has been our greatest danger.

But there is an opposite kind of heathenism with us. It knows only too well that

latter-day Britain has had her authentic culture disintegrated by the cult of "economic man" with its artificial work and recreation. It knows that we are not justified by our works. But it does not know that repentance is the power of renewal; it does not believe in justification by faith in the power of God to make us what He is calling upon us to become through the struggle and the victory. It cannot see in our act of war a possible catharsis of the national soul. It has such a deep-rooted resentment against society in general that, in its milder form, it listlessly feels that it matters little by whom we are governed, and in its most virulent aspect it is the stuff of which Fifth Columnists are made, who go over to the most destructive force on the map, whatever their nationality.

These two forms of heathenism must be dispelled, the one by conscious recantation of our recent past, the other by faith that the genuine British tradition with its roots in European Christendom and its own local excellence can take a twentieth century shape, if the forces of to-day are handled with spiritual awareness.

THE WAR AND NATIONAL RENEWAL

Already in the exigencies of war we can detect signs of providential judgment. We are not now so liable to measure the vitality of the English community by the prosperity of its "city" activities. In Mr. Churchill we have a return to real English politics, and it should be remembered that after the last war he showed himself to be also the good European who called for food to be sent to the German people. We are compelled, in order to fight, to do what ought to have

been done for the national wholesomeness anyhow, namely to redress some of the fatal misbalance between a neglected soil and a hypertrophied industrialism. While the enemy is hurling steel at us, we are hurling less steel at each other on the roads. Thousands of men have found in the R.A.F. a sense of vocation after years in unreal job-making activities to which an epoch of frustrated economic purposes had condemned them. The common danger has made in some measure a collection of real communities. In countless ways we can feel the warning and healing hand of God striking us in judgment to save.

The hard way of war is showing us some of the laws of life which we did not learn in the peace. It has broken up the unholy alliance between utopian idealism and the prudent cosmopolitanism of the trader spirit. If we can read the signs of the times it will also teach us that the foundations of true internationalism lie in the internal health of the constituent national communities. With the learning of this lesson we can recover a messianic consciousness of what Britain can be for Europe and the world, disinfected from false pretensions. We can win the war and remake Britain at the same time. We can then provide an object lesson in the conditions of being a good neighbour, namely in the ability to live well without expansion at the expense of others.

I believe that many people in this country are waiting for some such message to be uttered, however haltingly, in order to find in themselves a resurgence of that spiritual energy which we need at this time.

Yours sincerely,

V. A. DEMANT.

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